

Remarks at the Emergency Operations Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana September 5, 2005

First of all, thanks for doing your duty. You've faced one of the greatest challenges our country has ever faced. As a result of your compassion and your hard work and your dedication, a lot of people's lives were saved, and I want to thank you for that. I hope that makes you feel good, to know that you helped save life.

We've got a lot of work to do. I told the Governor and the Senators and the Congress people, I said, "You know, if it's not right, we're going to fix it, and if it is right, we're going to keep doing it." And this is just the beginning of a huge effort to—and we're going to continue to save life. But you've got to know that lives are still being saved as we speak because thousands of people are taking in these displaced souls, in their homes and churches

and synagogues and mosques and providing love and compassion and food.

This is one of these disasters that will test our soul and test our spirit. And—but we're going to show the world, once again, that not only we will survive, but that we will be stronger and better for it when it's all said and done, that amidst this darkness, there is light. And I want to thank you all for providing light, immediate light to people who needed help. You make your State and your local governments and your country proud.

God bless you and your families. May God bless the victims, and may God continue to bless our country. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:05 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana.

Remarks to the Community in Poplarville, Mississippi September 5, 2005

[*The President's remarks are joined in progress.*]

—out of this despair is going to come a vibrant coast. It's—again, I understand if you're saying to yourself, "Well, it's hard for me to realize what George W. is saying, because I've seen the rubble and I know what has happened to my neighbors." But I'd like to come back down here in about 2 years and walk your streets and see how vital this part of the world is going to be.

I can't wait to join you in the joy of welcoming neighbors back into neighborhoods, and small businesses up and running, and cutting those ribbons that somebody is creating new jobs. That's what I think is going to happen.

I just want you to know that when I'm thinking about how we can help this part of the world, Mississippi is on my mind. Mississippi is a part of the future of this country, and part of that future is to help you get back up on your feet. And I'm confident that your United States Senator Trent Lott, if I don't say it loud enough, he will. [*Laughter*] He'll remind us. But I appreciate you taking time out of your day.

And by the way, I'm traveling with good company. My wife, Laura, is with me too.

Let me conclude by asking for God's blessings on you all and your families and friends, and let you know we're here for the long term. I understand. I understand the damage. I understand the devastation.

I understand the destruction. I understand how long it's going to take. And we're with you. That's what I want you to know. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:12 p.m. at Pearl River Community College. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters September 6, 2005

The President. Thank you all for coming. My message to the Cabinet this morning is this: This administration is not going to rest until every life can be saved, until families are reconnected, until this recovery is complete. Our goals—our immediate goals are these: We want to complete the search-and-recovery; we want to restore essential services; we want to drain the water in the affected areas and begin removing debris; we want to—and are assessing public health and safety matters.

I've asked the Vice President to go down to the affected region on Thursday. He will go down to assess our recovery efforts. He will help me determine whether or not we're meeting these goals. He'll work with Secretary Chertoff and others to make sure that we remove any obstacles, bureaucratic obstacles that may be preventing us from achieving our goals. In other words, bureaucracy is not going to stand in the way of getting the job done for the people.

I was briefed on plans to immediately help our folks, plans to reconnect families, plans to make sure health care is available. And Secretary Leavitt gave me a good brief—plans on housing, both immediate and long-term housing. Most importantly, I was briefed by members of my Cabinet about how we're going to make sure that people who are owed a Social Security check, get their Social Security check. At the center in Baton Rouge I went to yesterday, I remember clearly a person saying, "When am I going to get my Social Security check?" And it's important to note, people understand we have a strategy to

make sure the benefits that are due are going to get to them.

Now, we understand people are scattered out across the country, but we have an obligation to make sure that whether a veteran's benefit or an unemployment benefit or a Social Security benefit gets to these people. And so we have a strategy in place, and we're going to implement that strategy—to find people who are in those shelters or in churches or in private homes—and get them the benefit.

A lot of people are doing good work. We've got a heck of a lot more work to do, and that's exactly what this Government is going to do.

Hurricane Katrina Recovery Efforts

Q. Mr. President.

The President. Yes, Bob [Bob Franken, Cable News Network].

Q. Do you intend to replace any from your administration who are leading this recovery effort, who were part of the effort last week that has been so widely criticized?

The President. What I intend to do is lead a—to lead an investigation to find out what went right and what went wrong. And I'll tell you why. It's very important for us to understand the relationship between the Federal Government, the State government, and the local government when it comes to a major catastrophe. And the reason it's important is, is that we still live in an unsettled world. We want to make sure that we can respond properly if there's a WMD attack or another major storm.